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ABSTRACT

Forces that would wrest personal autonomy from us are presently at work, both directly and indirectly, in the sports profession and in society at large. We are typically confused on the subject of man's nature; we have arbitrarily and unwisely relegated it to the subdisciplinary area of metaphysics where the topic rests in some disarray because of the plethora of theories that currently prevails. These confusing and overlapping concepts of man's nature confound many of our presentations and discussions. We have a definite responsibility to our students to help them form their own, highly personal positions as to man's basic nature. The need for more effective communication within the area of sport and physical activity philosophy is self-evident. Because of the varied methodological approaches we employ, we are seemingly not communicating too well with each other, and our voices are not having a significant influence on those involved with sport in the culture. Members of the Philosophic Society for the Study of Sport have a contribution of vital importance to make in regard to sport's cultural role. (Author/CD)

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IN SPORT, AS IN ALL OF LIFE, MAN SHOULD BE COMPREHENSIBLE TO MAN

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Introduction

A presidential address offered at the conclusion of a banquet preceded by refreshments, coming as it does at the end of a day filled with the presentation of weighty papers, is hardly the place for a closely reasoned statement on some presumably timeless problem upon which the future of sport and physical activity philosophy rests in "uneasy disarray." If some of "ye people of little faith" are looking longingly at the nearest exit, I command you to "cease and desist"; my spies are everywhere with strict orders to employ their disintegrator ray guns upon the person of anyone daring to vacate the premises except, and only if, extremely extenuating circumstances prevail. Somewhat more seriously, the sum total of these words has been carefully measured through the use of a stopwatch, and you should be on your feet again -- unless for some reason moved to a standing ovation sooner -- in close to twenty minutes. Finally, if someone is moved to state that such a statement is just about nineteen minutes too long, my plaintive response can only be, "have a heart; you may be in this same predicament somewhat sooner than you think!"

The Text for the Presentation*

The above remarks notwithstanding, I do have some serious ideas for your consideration. I have chosen as the text for my comments some fairly familiar passages from The Bible, Genesis 11.1-9, which

SP009 863

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read as follows:

> And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said to one another, Go to, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for morter. And they said, Go to, let us build up a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, Behold the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restricted from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth . . .

Thus endeth the reading of God's word, and it should be immediately obvious to all that the reference was to the biblical Tower of Babel located in the Babylonian city where Noah's descendants, who evidently spoke the same language, made a strong effort to build a tower designed to reach heaven. Such a presumption could not be tolerated by a stern Jehovah, and the building project ended in confusion when their words became incomprehensible to each other.

Statement of the Problems

It would serve no important purpose to carry the above passage (or analogy) too far in an effort to make my point. However, I believe that it may be possible for us to glean at least three important points from this narrative describing the plight of this early people that can help us in this Society at a time when the philosophy of a specialized field known by some as sport and physical activity appears to be standing at a clear and definite crossroad. The first point is that a group of people bent on carrying

out a task requiresa necessary amount of freedom and autonomy to complete a project. Secondly, I believe strongly that we must reach general agreement or consensus on the nature of man (i.e., does a term like "human nature" have any essential meaning at all?). And, thirdly and lastly, I believe that we need to communicate ever so much more effectively than we are doing at present. These three problems, then, are those which trouble me most in my own work. Admittedly it has taken me slightly more than thirty years to arrive at this state of perplexity and concern. Nevertheless, I offer these thoughts to you as being possibly significant for those of us who are presently engaged in what has been relatively loosely designated as sport and physical activity philosophy. Obviously, it will not be possible to do much more than scratch the surface of these three important points.

The Necessary Freedom and Autonomy

I believe that it is vital for man to preserve a significant amount of freedom and personal autonomy in an evolving democratic society. Much of my work over the years has been built on this premise. Freedom is used here to describe the "condition of being able to choose and carry out purposes" (Muller, 1961, p. xiii). Even though some are very pessimistic about the future, I have consistently espoused what might be called "positive meliorism" as the best approach (i.e., the position that society has an "innate tendency" to improve, and that man should strive consciously to bring about a steadily improving societal condition). Thus, even though Heilbronner (1975, p. 14) asks the provocative question, "what has posterity ever done for me?", I am still amazed -- as is he -- by "the furious power of the biogenetic force we see

expressed in every living organism" (p. 15). Hopefully, despite the ecological impact of so many of technological man's actions, a survivalist ethic will somehow emerge that will assist the world's people to develop the necessary commitment required to aid men everywhere to make the material sacrifices that will be requisite for posterity's survival. In the process many of the present individual freedoms will continue to be challenged and, as Brubacher indicates, we will need to get "not just fired up, but incandescent about freedom" (1961, p. 17). In my opinion no power on earth should be allowed to wrest personal autonomy from us whatever the cost in personal sacrifice might be. It is my contention that such forces (or power) are presently at work both directly and indirectly both within our profession and in society at large. We must not succumb to them.

The Basic Nature of Man

Although we can immediately agree that the descendants of Noah living at Babel were denied the necessary freedom to build their tower, it could be argued that these early people understood quite clearly that they were ruled over by a stern God who was responsible for their very creation -- and thereby they "knew" their basic nature. Would that such were the case today! As it seems to be happening at present man is having great difficulty in remaining comprehensible to his fellow man. An examination of several historical views of the nature of man makes obvious immediately that there are implications for education from the various definitions or "images" of man's nature that have been suggested, and undoubtedly these same concepts apply to man's sport and physical

activity patterns.

For years I have been intrigued by educational philosopher Van Cleve Morris's fivefold definition of man (1956) which described him roughly on a historical time scale as (1) a rational animal split into mind and body; (2) a spiritual being including the three dimensions of mind, body, and soul; (3) a "knowing creature" that absorbed knowledge for life improvement, with a body that developed "naturally"; (4) a redefined Platonic-Aristotelean man divided into mind and body as aspects of the basic organic unity, with only "lip service"granted to the importance of man's physical activity; and (5) a problem-solving organism in the process of evolution, in which mind and body were considered to be "instrumental extensions" of one another.

Then in the 1960s, Professors Berelson and Steiner carried out a significant inventory of Human Behavior (1964) in which they presented ordered generalizations based on the findings of 1,056 selected studies. They trace six images of man throughout recorded history. The first of these was the so-called Philosophical Image (pp. 662-667) in which man of the ancient world distinguished virtues through the employment of his reason. This was followed by what they called the Christian Image where man added the concept of original sin and possible redemption through the transfiguring love of God for those who controlled their sinful impulses. The third delineation was the Political Image of man during the Renaissance in which man, through the introduction of his power and will, managed to take greater control of the social environment; in the process sufficient energy was liberated to bring about numerous political changes, the

end result being the creation of national ideals which coexisted with somewhat earlier religious ideals. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a fourth image emerged. This Economic Image provided an underlying rationale for man's economic development in regard to the possession of property and things along with improved monetary standards. Efforts were being made to equate the concept of 'individual good' with that of the 'common good,' while at the same time the third basic political division, that of class, was more sharply delineated.

The early twentieth century saw the development of a fifth Psychoanalytic Image that introduced another form of love -- with ego and self, as the instinctual impulses were delineated more carefully than ever before. An effort was made to understand the role of childhood experiences in man's life, and how non-conscious controls often ruled man's actions because of the often incomplete gratification of certain human drives related to libido and sex. Finally, because of the rapid development of the behavioral sciences, Berelson and Steiner postulated the Behavioral Science Image of man. This view of man characterized him as a creature who is continually and continuously adapting reality to his own ends. In this way he seeks to make it more pleasant and congenial -- and, to the greatest possible extent, his own reality.

You may well ask, "what are you trying to tell us?" Simply this -- that in my opinion we are typically confused on the subject of man's nature; that we have arbitrarily and unwisely relegated it to the sub-disciplinary area of metaphysics where the topic rests in some disarray because of the plethora of theories that currently

prevails (Taylor, 1963, p. 13); that these confusing and overlapping concepts of man's nature confound many of our presentations and discussions; that it may well be fundamentally important for us to clarify our concepts, thoughts, and stances in this regard; and lastly that, as people concerned professionally or semi-professionally with philosophy, we have a definite responsibility to our students to help them to form their own, highly personal position as to man's basic nature. I agree fully with Rhinelander (1973, p. xiii) when he states, "The truth is that we cannot avoid making metaphysical assumptions about the world and the place of human beings in it; if we turn away from such topics, we succeed only in hiding the nature of our assumptions and leaving them unexamined."

The Need for More Effective Communication

Despite my pleas for retention of the concepts of 'freedom' and 'autonomy' as integral aspects of our philosophical endeavors, and for the role of metaphysical inquiry as fundamental in the life of problem-solving, inventive, behavioral science-oriented man seeking to shape and adapt reality to his own ends, I recognize full well the vital importance of removing every possible bit of ambiguity from our statements. Rudolf Carnap's "principle of tolerance has long since conveyed to us the idea that the philosopher can use any language that he wishes, so long as he makes clear the rules of language that he is employing. We realize further that the "verifiability theory of meaning" has placed traditional approaches to metaphysical speculation in serious difficulty because many of the questions raised were simply not genuine and answerable.

Sport and physical activity philosophy contains as many pitfalls

as any other aspect of cultural life for the unwary scholar. The term "game" has some seventeen different usages as a noun, while "sport" has at least thirteen different meanings. If this does not causes enough problems, be warned that the term "play" is employed in at least seventy-four different ways as both a noun and a verb (The Random House Dictionary, Unabridged, 1967). Our good old English language is said to be suffering from so-called semantic aphasia, which has been described as a "numbness of ear, mind, and heart" . . . a "tone deafness to the very meaning of language -- which results from the habitual and prolonged abuse of language" (Time, March 8, 1971, p. 36).

Camus has put the problem in excellent perspective in The Rebel when he points out that "the mutual understanding and communication discovered by rebellion can survive only in the free exchange of conversation" (p. 283):

> Every ambiguity, every misunderstanding, leads to death; clear language and simple words are the only salvation from this death. The climax of every tragedy lies in the deafness of its heroes. Plato is right and not Moses and Nietzsche. Dialogue on the level of mankind is less costly than the gospel preached by totalitarian regimes in the form of a monologue dictated from the top of a lonely mountain . . . (1956, pp. 283-284)

Thus, whether you view linguistic analysis as the only logical methodology to employ in your philosophizing, or whether you see it as an "important handmaiden" used "essentially to overcome the functional disorders of language induced by the distortions of usage characteristic of traditional philosophic reflection" (Kaplan, 1961, pp. 62-63), I urge you to remain aware of the need for continuous, "rational reconstruction" of the language of the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences as these may relate to

sport and physical activity philosophy. I believe personally that we need such analysis to help us keep our facts, figures, and words as straight as possible, but also that we in society need a philosophy to live by. I cannot see how we can have the one without the other.

Concluding Statement

In conclusion, I have stated that there is ample evidence that man's personal freedom and autonomy is in serious jeopardy today even in the so-called evolving democratic societies. In regard to sport, the interdependence of sport and culture is now such that our citizens view athletes as "cultural maximizers," and there seems to be almost nothing that educators can do in the United States to keep intercollegiate (and often interscholastic) athletics in proper perspective. This results quite often in a negation of autonomy and personal decision-making on the part of the financially tendered student-athlete. This denial of personal freedom is highly serious.

Insofar as an understanding of, or any assumptions about, man's basic nature, the evidence available in recent years in the realm of sport and physical activity literature indicates very little attention has been paid to this topic. Shogan, who is completing a study in this area, indicates that "Of over two hundred and thirty books and articles in the physical education and sport literature written since 1960, only twenty-four have been identified as referring to man's nature, and many of these did not do so in a direct treatment of the subject" (pp. 139-140). Considering the many problems of a highly serious nature extant in sport today, this paucity of material almost constitutes "dereliction of duty," and at the very

best may be classified as copying of and fearful, blind allegiance to the mother discipline's presumed correct research technique.

The need for more effective communication within sport and physical activity philosophy is self-evident. Because of the varied methodological approaches we employ, we are seemingly not communicating too well with each other, and who will dare to argue that our voices are having even a reasonably significant influence on those involved with sport at the different levels of our culture. Still further, how basic and fundamental are our courses in the core curricula of our disciplinary efforts? And the words of a former colleague still ring in my ears as I was leaving a large university for what I felt to be "greener pastures": "if I could find another sport historian, I'd try to hire him. But spare me from any more "G-d" philosophers!" Need I say more; we truly have our work cut out for us.

And yet I remain absolutely convinced of the vital importance of the contribution that we could be making -- and that we will hopefully be making some day in the not too distant future. Sport, athletics, play, and physical activity are integral aspects of our culture, and it is indeed movement that distinguishes man from the rock on the ground. Finally, perhaps we should be reminded of Aristotle's famous concept of 'the mean.' Virtue is indeed the mean between the vice of excess and the vice of defect. To make our best contribution in the years immediately ahead, we shall need to strive for the difficult mean of 'courage,' which lies somewhere between the folly of rashness and the ignominy of cowardice. My very best wishes to you all.

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